

Learning together

Solidarity at work

Volume 6, number 13, Spring 2006

Clear language makes strides at the CLC

2005 was a pivotal and exciting year for clear language and the labour movement. The Canadian Labour Congress constitution was rewritten in clear language and adopted at the CLC convention in Montreal in June 2005. The CLC developed and piloted a “train-the-trainer” course for clear language advocates. It collaborated on the development of a film on clear language, *The Invasion of the Space Lobsters*, with the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), partnering with several unions, federations of labour and the National Literacy Secretariat, HRSDC.

“Having a clear language constitution is an important step on our collective journey to making the labour movement stronger.”

Ken Georgetti, CLC President

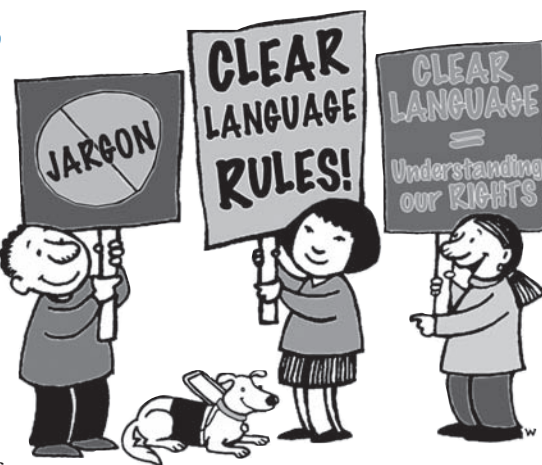
It was an historic moment when CLC President Ken Georgetti introduced the resolution to adopt the clear language version of the CLC constitution. “Clear language is about solidarity and inclusion,” emphasized Georgetti in his remarks to delegates. Georgetti also stressed that the clear language version does not change the meaning or intent of the constitution.

In 2004, under the leadership of Executive Vice-President Barbara Byers, the CLC began the process

of rewriting its constitution in clear language in English and French. Byers explained the importance of this undertaking. “Far too often, readers were frustrated and bewildered by the many different writing styles and duplications. People had difficulty understanding the constitution and finding what they were looking for.”

Byers put together a team of senior staff, editors and translators to take on the challenge. Members of the CLC Executive Council and their staff as well as convention delegates provided valuable input and feedback on drafts of the rewritten constitution.

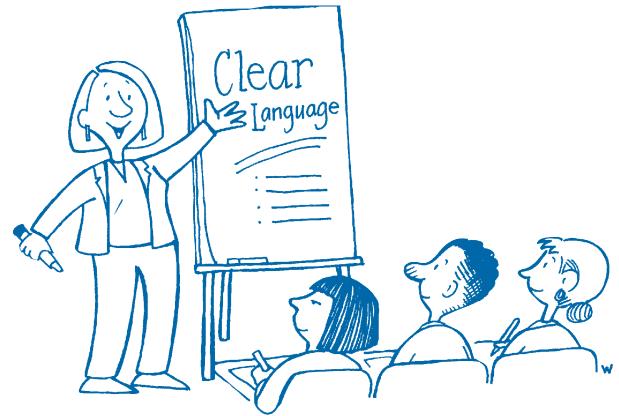
“Having a clear language constitution is an important step on our collective journey to making the labour movement stronger,” concludes Georgetti.



New “Train-the-trainer” course for clear language advocates

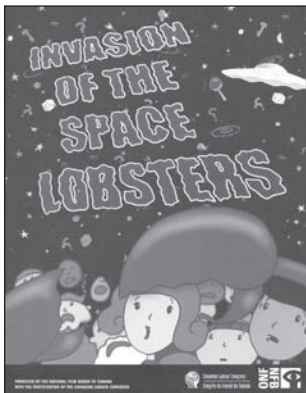
“The positive response to the new CLC clear language course *Train-the-trainer: Clear language and design* shows that it is meeting an important need,” emphasizes Tamara Levine, CLC Literacy Coordinator. “Since the labour movement relies so heavily on the written word to communicate with our members, it’s important that they are able to understand and defend their rights,” she adds.

The Train-the-trainer course, piloted at the CLC Ontario Winter School in 2005 and delivered in BC in 2006, trains facilitators for the CLC 9-hour module *Say what you mean: clear language is a union issue*. Participants generally have previous



experience or training in group facilitation and some background in clear language. They are sponsored by their organization with a plan to co-facilitate *Say what you mean* through their union, federation of labour or labour council.

Invasion of the Space Lobsters



This 6-minute animated film presents a light-hearted approach to clear communications by weaving “a thoroughly madcap animated parable pitting the virtues of clear language and good communication against bafflegab evil-doers”.

Giant lobsters who land on earth show the need for clear communication by highlighting the problems that the space lobsters have communicating with earthlings.

The film was launched at the Plain Language International Conference in Washington, D.C. in November, 2005. There was a great response to the film from conference delegates, clear language experts from several countries. Here is what some of them said: “I loved the film... it’s flexible for different audiences and leads to fantastic discussion.” Susan Milne, Chair, Plain Language International, Waterloo, Ontario. “This delightfully funny short film brings the issue of

clear language right into your own backyard.” Sally McBeth, Manager, Clear Language and Design, Toronto. “The film was the highlight of the PLAIN International conference for me... clever, brilliant.” William DuBay, Readability Consultant, Costa Mesa, California

“I can’t wait to use this humorous lobster appetizer in the next Clear Language training with the Labour Council!”

Karen Kennedy, CUPW Edmonton and Literacy representative, Alberta Federation of Labour

The film, available in English and French, can be used in education programs, staff training sessions, meetings and conferences to promote awareness of the value of clear language in the labour movement and beyond. The CLC is currently preparing a discussion guide to go with the film.

CLC affiliates can purchase the film in DVD or VHS format at the special union price of \$12 from the NFB at 1-800-267-7710 or at www.nfb.ca.

Labour on Ministerial Advisory Committee

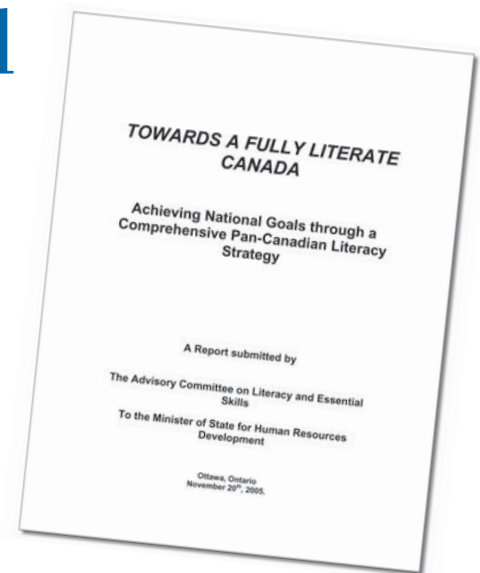
In October 2005, the former Minister of State for Human Resources Development Claudette Bradshaw put together a national advisory committee of 19 representatives from the literacy community across the country. These included representatives from labour, business, colleges, libraries, and Aboriginal, francophone and anglophone community-based literacy organizations. The task of the committee was to put together a report for the Minister that would outline a Pan-Canadian literacy and essential skills strategy. In late November, Minister Bradshaw released a summary of the committee's report: *Towards a Fully Literate Canada - Achieving National Goals through a Comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy*.

When Minister Bradshaw's office asked the CLC to appoint Tamara Levine, CLC Literacy Coordinator, to represent labour on the committee, she was somewhat skeptical about what the committee would be like. "I wondered if we would be able to come to a consensus, and I worried about the short timelines. I was also daunted by the responsibility of representing the views of labour as the only union representative," says Levine.

Levine stresses that being on the committee turned out to be an important opportunity to work with a diverse group of people committed to literacy. She notes that although there were some tensions, the group reached consensus quickly. "This was an opportunity to make excellent connections and for labour to be seen as a real player," says Levine. She believes that there were several factors that made the committee work. One factor was a sense of urgency. Another was that the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey released in the middle of the committee's work showed virtually no change in literacy levels in Canada since 1994. "This was ammunition for action," says Levine. "There were also good support systems for the committee, regular contact with Minister Bradshaw and excellent co-chairs," she adds.

Levine notes that one of the highlights of being on the committee was representing labour and realizing how much we have to contribute.

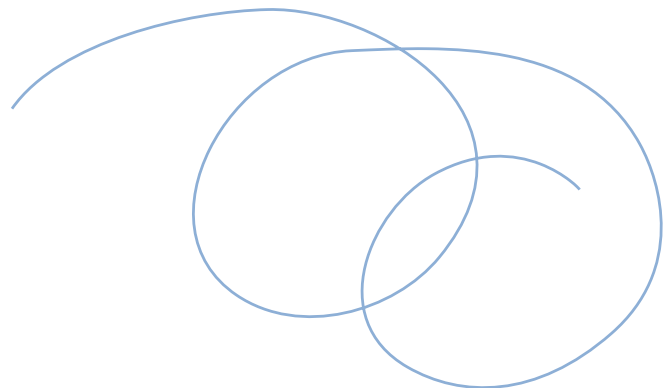
One important contribution is that literacy is not just about the individual, it's about social development and social change. A second highlight was finding a kinship with others around the table in new ways.



“The groundwork has been laid. It was a hopeful process.”

Levine concludes, "Even with a new government, the committee's report cannot be ignored. The groundwork has been laid. It was a hopeful process."

See <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/towards/cover.htm> for the report summary of *Towards a Fully Literate Canada – Achieving National Goals through a Comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy*



New CLC Research

Essential Skills and the Labour Movement: A Research Report

This research, sponsored by Human Resources Development Canada, was a preliminary step in looking at the range of labour's involvement and experience with essential skills. It is the first research report to capture labour's perspectives on essential skills. The CLC undertook this research in part because of the confusion about what is meant by the term "Essential Skills" and because it was interested in how labour is experiencing essential skills on the ground. For example, is it the same as or different from literacy? "We were able to get some valuable insight into the answers to some of those questions," states Barbara Byers, Executive Vice-President, CLC.

Thirty-nine people, for the most part from the Canadian labour movement but including some others who work with labour, participated in interviews. In addition, 28 labour representatives attended a focus group discussion in a day-long CLC Labour Forum on Essential Skills.

"Based on union principles, we need to develop a framework for how labour might engage with essential skills..."

**Barbara Byers,
Executive Vice-President, CLC.**

The responses showed that there is a range of ways through which the labour movement is defining and using essential skills. The majority of participants indicated they have at least some familiarity with the HRSDC Essential Skills project. However, most labour participants said they have not taken up the



official HRSDC Essential Skills Framework in their work. They have not done so because they are concerned that it lacks labour involvement and principles. Some do not see how it might be relevant to their work.

The findings indicated that where labour is using the official framework, it is mostly to develop assessment tools. Some intend to use it to develop training in the future. Research participants who have used the Essential Skills Profiles tend to think they are useful tools.

The main view from labour representatives is that the Essential Skills Framework is narrow and does not represent the broad view of literacy that labour uses in its work. Another fear is that there is less space for a labour approach to literacy within HRSDC's current policy.

Recommendations from the CLC include working with HRSDC to address labour's concerns about Essential Skills.

Byers concludes, "Based on union principles, we need to develop a framework for how labour might engage with essential skills as we have done in the past in other areas. This research provides us with a starting point for further investigation."

Workplace Literacy: Funding Sources and Partnership Opportunities for Labour

The Canadian Labour and Business Centre undertook this research for the CLC under the direction of Brigid Hayes, CLBC Director, Labour. The motivation for the research came from the CLC's Literacy Working Group (LWG), composed of affiliate and federation of labour representatives working in the area of literacy and clear language.



The LWG wanted to find out what sources of funding are available to labour to support literacy activities, especially program delivery. Another goal of the research was to find out what the strengths and weaknesses are of the literacy partnership opportunities available to labour. The findings show that there are few sources of funding for the direct delivery of workplace literacy programs that labour can access. In addition, provinces and territories mostly do not support workplace literacy activities, including labour-led projects.

The main source of funding available to labour is through the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). However, this funding focuses on national projects and does not support program delivery. Although labour projects have had a positive impact, unions are limited by the lack of funds for program delivery. The only additional sources of funds beside the

NLS identified by labour were employer-negotiated funds and provincial / territorial training plans.

While some unions have made significant progress towards integrating literacy and clear language into the ongoing work of their organizations, research participants identified the added advantage of having a permanent staff person dedicated to supporting literacy within the union.

In the future, unions will need to concentrate on working together to change government funding practices, find resources in their organizations and expand partnerships.

The findings on partnerships show that labour representatives think they are a good thing. Those who were part of workplace literacy consortia in three provinces - Nova Scotia, PEI and Manitoba - were mostly satisfied with their participation. One challenge is that the union leadership does not always understand the importance of literacy. Another is that labour cannot always participate fully in the partnership because it has no dedicated literacy position.

The research conclusions note that labour has made an impact in the area of literacy and is an important stakeholder. They indicate that all labour's activities have happened without ongoing, sustainable funding. In the future, unions will need to concentrate on working together to change government funding practices, find resources in their organizations and expand partnerships.

For a copy of these reports, please contact Tamara Levine, CLC Literacy Co-ordinator at (613) 526-7437 or tlevine@clc-ctc.ca.

From the provinces and beyond...

“Lighting the way”: a clear language workshop for Nova Scotia labour councils

The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour is “Lighting the Way” once again! The federation was the first in Canada to bring together labour councils for the province-wide workshop *Say what you mean: clear language is a union issue* in New Glasgow on January 7th and 8th, 2006. Rick Clarke, NSFL President and Linda Gallant, CLC Atlantic Regional Director opened the weekend workshop, which was co-facilitated by Tamara Levine, CLC Literacy Co-ordinator and Linda Wentzel, NSFL Workplace Education Co-ordinator.



**“I will take a look
at what I write with more
concern for the audience.”**

Workshop participant

Labour council delegates from across Nova Scotia were introduced to the principles and tools of clear language and design, brainstorming ways to apply their new insights to the work of labour councils in the community. The delegates took home several clear language resources, including the new National Film Board film *Invasion of the Space Lobsters*.

By all accounts, the participants deemed the workshop a success. Here are some of their comments:

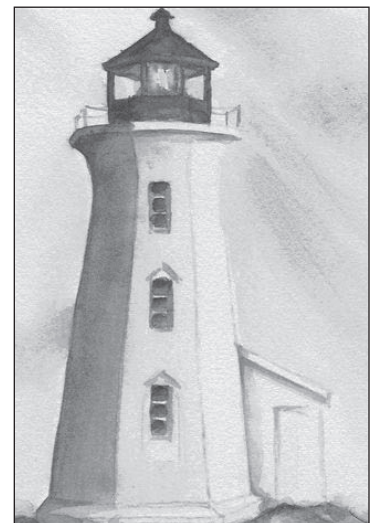
- *I now have a better understanding about the need for clear language.*
- *An excellent course with a good mix of theory and practical applications.*
- *Now I am not as unsure of my writing because I will be better equipped to edit.*
- *I will take a look at what I write with more concern for the audience.*
- *The course materials are an excellent resource for future use.*

Say what you mean: clear language is a union issue will be offered by these Nova Scotia labour councils in the coming months:

- New Glasgow and District Labour Council, April 21, 2006
- South Shore and District Labour Council, October 2006 (details to be announced soon.)

For more information, contact CLC Representative, Paulette Sadoway at 902-455-2965 or e-mail: psadoway@clc-ctc.ca.

By Linda Wentzel, NSFL Workplace Education Co-ordinator



It's getting clearer

The Literacy Project of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour (NLFL) is up and running. The project, funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, HRSDC, works with an advisory committee of affiliate representatives to increase literacy awareness and skills and to bring clear language to our workplaces and unions. The focus of the project is to develop a strategy for workplace literacy training based on a partnership model between employers, government and unions.

The CLC 9-hour module *Say what you mean: clear language is a union issue* is gaining interest with local unions. Clear language workshops have been delivered to PSAC members in St. John's, at the South Coast & District Labour Council and at the NAPE (Newfoundland and Labrador

Association of Public and Private Employees) summer school, sparking great interest among participants.



PSAC has initiated the literacy and clear language training as part of its education program in the Atlantic Region. Courses on literacy and clear language have been scheduled for Labrador, St. John's and Gander later this spring.

"We have a tremendous need for literacy in this province, and this project will help move us forward," said Reg Anstey, NLFL President. "We're planning to get together with employers here to push the provincial government to provide support to workplace education. It's long overdue."

Margie Hancock, Literacy Coordinator
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour

Robert Wedel: Union literacy champion

June 17, 1953 - March 10, 2006

Many of us across the country are mourning the loss of Robert Wedel, long-time union activist and champion of workplace literacy. An instructor at Capilano College in Vancouver for 16 years, Rob was a staunch supporter of labour who derived great satisfaction from his work in adult literacy.

Trained as a teacher, Rob discovered early on that his true love was working with adult learners. He left traditional teaching to work in road construction, community services and prison education. In 1990, Rob started teaching Adult Basic Education at Capilano College. In 1992, he started a literacy program at Lion's Gate Hospital and discovered his life's passion: workplace education.

Each summer, Rob returned to work in the construction industry. As a worker himself, Rob understood the difficulties many workers face when they lack basic skills. At the college, Rob worked tirelessly to develop workplace education programs in the healthcare and forestry sectors of BC.

Rob's approach to literacy was about empowering the learner, taking every opportunity to enable learners to become active participants in their own learning. His style was democratic, eclectic and modest. He was able to listen to the learner with an open mind, always looking for ways to adapt material to their situation. Rob's dedication changed the lives of many learners and peer tutors.

Robert never shied away from a challenge at work or at home. He will be terribly missed by the love of his life, Trudy, his stepchildren and grandchildren. He also leaves many colleagues, friends and community supporters. Trudy hopes to establish a bursary for a workplace education student at Capilano. For information, contact Kari Johnson at (604) 984-1759.

See "*Labour of Love*", an interview with Rob Wedel, in "*Literacies*": Fall 2004 at www.literacyjournal.ca.

Labour Roundtables on Literacy and Essential Skills Held Across Canada¹

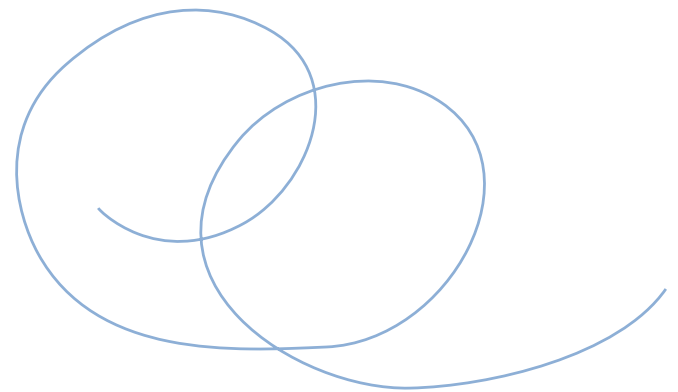
In September 2005, approximately 60 labour representatives from across Canada participated in roundtables on literacy and essential skills. The half-day labour roundtables, organized by Human Resources Development Canada, took place in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa and Halifax. The purpose of the roundtables was to get labour input into a comprehensive strategy for literacy and essential skills. The labour roundtables were part of a larger national consultative process involving community literacy groups and business.

There were eight common themes that came out of the labour roundtables:

1. Literacy and essential skills are important. There is a need for federal action.
2. Labour has an enormous stake in literacy and essential skills as it represents over 3 million unionized workers. Labour wants to work with government and employers as a full and equal partner to develop a comprehensive literacy and essential skills strategy.
3. There is a need for a broad and holistic view of literacy which goes beyond the workplace and jobs and sees the worker as a whole person. A strategy needs to include both the employed and unemployed, and those who need training in English or French as a Second Language. It needs to provide special support for groups such as Aboriginal people and immigrants.
4. Sustainability was a key theme. The federal government needs to develop a well-funded national training system that goes beyond pilot projects.
5. There are several tools that the federal government could use to deliver a national training system, including 1) a training levy similar to the Quebec law requiring employers to spend 1% of payroll on workplace training,
- 2) the Canada Labour Code, 3) Labour Market Development Agreements, and 4) EI funds as training insurance.
6. A well-funded public education system is the foundation of both a literate society and a quality workplace training strategy.
7. There is a need for literacy and essential skills training within apprenticeship and the skilled trades.
8. Employers in both the public and private sectors must be committed to literacy and essential skills.

At the roundtables, labour representatives identified four common priorities for federal government action. These priorities were:

- stable long-term funding through the development of a national training strategy,
- labour as an equal partner in the development and implementation of a national training strategy,
- restoration of the public education system, and
- a well-funded national strategy and standards to address essential skills and apprenticeship.



¹ Information from this article comes from a summary of common themes and priorities from the labour roundtables prepared by HRSDC.

PROGRAMA INTEGRAR: A New Approach From Brazil

The buzz is still in the air following the Steelworkers' visit to *Programa Integrar* (integrate), a project of the Brazilian metalworkers. Delegates from Mozambique, South Africa and Canada participated in train-the-trainer sessions, visited classrooms and workers' co-ops and discussed the program with Brazilian union leaders.

Programa Integrar has a political vision of resistance while creating alternatives at the same time. It combines education, training and political action with a focus on employment and includes a Laboratory for Sustainable Development and Economy of Solidarity to work on alternative income-generating activities. It is delivered to employed and unemployed metalworkers and to union leadership.

Why the name *Programa Integrar*?

The term "integrate" is used to:

- link skills training, basic education, literacy and action on public policy,
- bring the unemployed back into the economy, the union and civil society,
- build an understanding of the economic and political forces that create unemployment,
- strengthen union leadership's capacity to confront current global economic and political forces,
- build across diversity,
- recognize workers' knowledge and skills, and
- design an education process that weaves workers' prior learning with the knowledge of academic disciplines.

What does it look like?

- Classes are organized thematically with history, math, language, etc. woven into the learning activities with a focus on work and technology, urban society, community economic development, computer skills, etc.
- Study visits to points of cultural and political interest often involve families.
- Workshops designed by participants bring representatives from government, business and civil society to debate public policies.
- Workers learn in study circles.
- Monthly workshops with planned learning

activities are carried out in unions and communities between sessions.

- While historically the Brazilian tripartite workers' aid fund for training and adjustment had only been used by companies, unions are now using this fund through *Programa Integrar* to create training programs and promote action around unemployment and social exclusion.



What is the *Laboratory for Sustainable Development*?

The union has built relationships with cooperatives, worker-run factories, and community enterprises with a view to accessing alternative income-generating activities. The union is engaged in: 1) looking at what these local economic development initiatives mean in the current economic context, and 2) learning how to effectively support its former members now engaged in these income-generating activities. *Programa Integrar* starts from the assumption that unemployment is not caused by workers' lack of training but by a lack of public policy to create employment. Solving unemployment and social exclusion needs to be a task of society as a whole.

Programa Integrar has a political vision of resistance while creating alternatives at the same time.

Unions have a unique knowledge of workers' lives. With 280,000 unemployed Brazilians participating in *Programa Integrar* over the last decade, the metalworkers can justifiably say to their government that there are alternatives. Unions have shown that there is a viable way to provide education and training for the unemployed and excluded that can successfully reintegrate them into active citizenship.

The CLC Literacy Working Group

The CLC Literacy Working Group is composed of affiliates and federation representatives with an interest in union-based literacy and clear language. The Working Group meets twice yearly to share information and resources, learn from our collective

experiences and advise the CLC on its Workplace Literacy Project. Contact your Literacy Working Group representative for more information about what's going on in your organization.

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